

## 192 EMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER

of real merit in the book was Guy de Maupassant's. For him, so far as the book-reading public was concerned, "Les Soirees de Me"dan" proved virtually a *debut*, whose promise his subsequent writings confirmed. "Boule de Suif," as he called his contribution to the volume, was the tale of a woman, who is shown sacrificing herself, during the Franco-German "War, for the convenience and safety of others. They entreat her in that sense, and yet as soon as they are free they spurn her and abandon her to her shame. This woman, like the other people figuring in the story, actually lived,<sup>1</sup> and indeed it would be difficult to find half a dozen really imaginary characters in all Guy de Maupassant's tales. He carried the passion for personalities even farther than Alphonse Daudet did, and there exists, it is said, a set of his writings, on the margins of which he himself wrote the real names of almost every person and locality he ever described. One may conclude that he was perhaps a more genuine Naturalist than Zola, his work being invariably based on "human documents," the fruit of personal observation and experience. This occasionally tended to make his art unduly photographic; but, at the same time, as is well known, his literary style was excel-

<sup>1</sup> Her real name was Adrienne Legay and she really bore the nickname of "Ball of Tallow." She was of peasant extraction, and was born near Fe'camp about 1850. Coming to Rouen, where she became the mistress of a cavalry officer and later of a manufacturer of cotton goods, she at one time kept a small hosiery shop, at another a little cafe". Finally, after making a precarious living as a fortune-teller, she committed suicide at Rouen in August, 1892. She often declared to the literary men who became acquainted with her that she herself gave Maupassant the idea of his story by telling him an adventure of hers, which, however, had not resulted in the manner he described; and she accused him of having pilloried her in a spirit of revenge for having rejected his suit when he was a penniless hobbledehoy at Rouen.